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06/23/03 Warthogs, air tanker flyovers punctuate Engineer's Day

By JACK STOREY/The Evening News

SAULT STE. MARIE - Two military flyovers will punctuate the several special activities planned for Friday's Engineer's Day open house at the Soo Locks.

Corps of Engineers officials recently confirmed that two separate flights from two different Michigan airfields will be part of the special observance of the 60th anniversary of the MacArthur Lock's completion in 1943.

Around 11 a.m., a group of four A-10 Thunderbolts from the 107th Fighter Wing in Battle Creek will swoop low over the Locks. A twin-engined workhorse among ground support fighter aircraft, the A-10 is designed to fly slow and low over the battlefield.

Although officially known as the "Thunderbolt," the A-10 is better known by its other nickname, "Warthog," by pilots and crews on the flight line. Principally used as a "tank-killer" aircraft, the A-10 enjoys a reputation for its durability in combat.

Another venerable military aircraft from a separate unit at Selfridge Field Air National Guard base will also put in an appearance overhead of the Locks on Friday morning. Equipped as a tanker for mid-air refueling, a KC-135 from Selfridge will set off the MacArthur Lock anniversary.

Powered by four jet engines, the medium-sized transport aircraft serves a number of purposes, including the air tanker version, in its several adaptations.

Flyovers by two types of workhorse military aircraft that will initiate Friday's observance make for a fitting tribute to the MacArthur Lock, a durable performer in its very different role. Designed and built in just over a year in 1942-'43 - an engineering achievement in itself - the MacArthur has proven the most reliable of the four lock chambers in the Soo Locks complex.

Another centerpiece of the 60th anniversary observance is a presentation of a commemorative plaque to an official from Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Co., the lead contractor on that long-ago construction project.

The flyovers and plaque presentation are set for 11 a.m.

A separate observance during the day will formally dedicate the Corps survey vessel Bufe, a craft named after former Corps surveyor Bancroft Bufe. A 50-year veteran of federal government service, Bufe rounded out his career with the Corps in 1977 as a civil engineer at the Soo Area Office.

An Army band will also entertain visitors through the special Engineer's Day open house.

The inner fence gates at the Soo Locks open for public tours at 10 a.m. and remain open until 4 p.m. Public access to the inner area of the Soo Locks complex is limited to Engineer's Day each June.

Anyone may attend the various observances scheduled for Friday's edition of the popular tour event.

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